

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 05959 01 OF 02 171223Z
ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 961
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL MADRAS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DACCA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE
USLO PEKING IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL HONG KONG IMMEDIATE
CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 5959

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SOPN PINR IN US
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR DDEVICE
IN THE HIMALAYAS

1. THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF THE STATEMENT MADE BY
PRIME MINISTER DESAI IN THE LOK SABHA ON MONDAY.
APRIL 17, 1978, CONCERNING PRESS REPORS OF A NUCLEAR
POWERED MONITORING DEVICE HAVING BEEN INSTALLED IN
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 05959 01 OF 02 171223Z

THE HIMALAYAN REGION OF INDIA:

BEGIN TEXT:

HONOURABLE MEMBERS ARE QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY EXERCISED
OVER THE REPORTS THAT HAVE APPEARED IN THE PRESS HERE BASED ON
A NEWS-ITEM WHICH APPEARED IN THE UNITED STATES ABOUT THE

ATTEMPT TO LOCATE A NUCLEAR-FUELLED POWER-PACK ON THE HEIGHTS OF NANDA DEVI. THE FAILURE IN THIS ATTEMPT WHICH HAS RAISED JUST APPREHENSIONS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF CONTAMINATION OF THE WATERS OF OUR SACRED RIVER GANGA. I CAN ASSURE THE HOUSE THAT ALL OF US SHARE THIS CONCERN OF THE HONOURABLE MEMBERS AS WELL AS BY THE PEOPLE AT LARGE AT THE POSSIBLE HAZARDS TO OUR ENVIRONMENT AND PEOPLE.

THE HOUSE IS AWARE THAT AS SOON AS THESE REPORTS CAME TO OUR ATTENTION, WE EXPRESSED OUR GRAVE CONCERN TO THE US AUTHORITIES AND HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THEM IN NEW DELHI AND IN WASHINGTON. WE HAVE ALSO MADE THOROUGH ENQUIRIES AT OUR END TO OBTAIN AS COMPLETE DETAILS

AS POSSIBLE IN THE LAST FEW DAYS. IN THE LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL SITUATION PREVAILING AT THAT TIME AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS WHICH WERE TAKING PLACE BOTH FAR AND NEAR IT WAS DECIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL THAT A REMOTE SENSING DEVICE WITH NUCLEAR POWER-PAK SHOULD BE INSTALLED NEAR THE HIGHEST POINT OF NANDA DEVI WITH HE OBJECT OF SECURING INFORMATION ABOUT MISSILE DEVELOPMENTS. ACCORDINGLY, A MOUNTANEERING EXPEDITION MANNED ONLY BY INDIAN MOUNTAINEERS WENT UP THE NANDA DEVI FOLLOWED BY A JOINT INDO-AMERICAN EXPEDITION SCIENIFICALLY EQUIPPED
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 05959 01 OF 02 171223Z

WITH THE DEVICE WITH A VIEW TO INSTALLING IT AT A HEIGHT OF 25,000 FEET.

WHEN HE EXPEDITION WAS APPROACHING THE SUMMIT, IT WAS OVERTAKEN BY A BLIZZARD WHICH MADE FURTHER ASCEND IMPOSSIBLE AND FACING FATAL HAZARDS TO THE PARTY, THEY WERE OBLIGED TO RETREAT TO THE LOWER CAMPT AT A HEIGHT OF 23,000 FT. IN THE PRECIPITATE DESCENT UNDER VERY TRYING AND EXACTING CONDITIONS THEY HAD TO LEAVE THE POWER-PACK SECURELY CACHED. WITH THE ONSLAUGHT OF WINTER, NO ATTEMPT TO LOCATE AND RETRIEVE THE DEVICE WAS IMMEDIATELY POSSIBLE AND HAD TO BE POSTPONED. ANOTHER EXPEDITION WAS MOUNTED IN MAY 1966 THAT IS IN THE FOLLOWING SPRING, WITH THE INTENTION OF RETRIEVING AND INSTALLING THE DEVICE. HOWEVER, THE EXPEDITION PARTY ON ARRIVAL AT THE AREA DISCOVERED THAT A MAJOR AVALANCHE HAD OCCURRED AROUND THE AREA AND THE DEVICE COULD NOT BE LOCATED. EVERY ATTEMPT WAS MADE BY GROUND AND AERIAL SEARCH AIDED SUPERSENSITIVE SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT TO TRACE THE POWER PACK BUT THESE EFFORTS PROVED IN VAIN. AFTER ALL SUCH ATTEMPTS CONCLUSION REACHED BY OUR EXPERTS WHICH INCLUDED SCIENTISTS WAS THAT IF THE POWER-PACK HAD BROKEN, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DETECTED THROUGH THESE MEANS AND THE

LIKELIHOOD WAS THAT THE DEVICE GOT BURED DEEP SOMEWHERE AFTER HAVING BEEN SMOTHERED OR CARRIED INTO NEIGHBOURING CREVICE BY THE AVALANCHE. SEARCHES BOTH ON THE GROUND AND BY HELICOPTERS WERE OJGANIZED EVERY YEAR OVER A WIDE AREA AND CONTINUED TILL LATE 1968 BUT WITHOUT THE EQUIPMENT BEING SIGHTED OR DETECTED BY SCIENTIFIC MEANS.

SIMULTANEOUSLY SAMPLES OF THE WATER WERE TAKEN UP TO 1970 AND WERE UNDER OBSERVATION FOR SOME YEARS BUT NO TRACE OF CONTAMINATION WAS DETECTED.

IN 1967, A NEW DEVICE WAS TAKEN TO THE SAME AREA AND WAS DULY INSTALLED ON A NEIGHBOURING PEAK. THIS FUNCTIONED NORMALLY FOR A WHILE BUT WAS REMOVED SUBSEQUENTLY IN 1968
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PAGE 04 NEW DE 05959 01 OF 02 171223Z

AND THE EQUIPMENT WAS RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES. THESE OPERATIONS, AS I SAID, WERE APPARENTLY CARRIED OUT PREDOMINANTLY BY INDIAN PERSONNEL BUT UNDER JOINT AUSPICES AND WERE IN HE KNOW OF AND WITH THE APPROVAL AT HE HIGHEST POLITICAL LEVEL OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AT THAT TIME.

AFTER THE NEWS REPORTS APPEARED A FEW DAYS AGO WE HAVE ASSEMBLED RELEVANT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND OF THESE EXPEDITIONS WITH REFERENCE TO AVAILABLE RECORD AND IN CONSULTATION WIH BOTH THE US GOVERNMENT AND THE INDIAN DEPARTMENTS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT.

WE HAVE TRIED TO GET AS MUCH TECHNICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEVICE AS WAS POSSIBLE. ACCORDING TO INFORMATION OBTAINED AND PUBLISHED LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT, THE DEVICE COMPRISES OF A POWER SYSTEM ENERGISED BY 2 TO 3 LBS. OF PLUTONIUM-238 METAL ALLOY WHICH IS CONTAINED IN SEVERAL DOUBLY ENCAPSULATED LEAKTIGHT CAPSULES. THE INNER CAPSULES ENCLOSING THE PLUTONIUM ARE MADE OF 22MM THICK TANTALUN - A REFRACTORY METAL.

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 05959 02 OF 02 171321Z
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UNCLAS SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 5959

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

--A REFRACTORY METAL.....

THE PRIMARY FUNCTION OF TANTALUM IS TO INHIBIT
CORROSIVE ACTION OF THE PLUTONIUM FUEL. THE OUTER
CAPSULES ARE OF NICKEL ALLOY HAVING HIGH STRENGTH AND
TEMPERATURE RESISTANT PROPERTIES. THE CAPSULES ARE ENCASED IN A
GRAPHITE HEAT BLOCK WHICH ALONGWITH THE THERMO-ELECTRICAL
MODULES IN TURN IS ENCASED IN A CYLINDRICAL
ALUMINIUM CASING WHICH IS 14 INCHES IN DIAMETER AND 13 INCHES
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 05959 02 OF 02 171321Z

HIGH. THE TOTAL WEIGHT OF THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY WAS 38 LBS.

ACCORDING TO THE RECORDS IT IS CLEAR THAT AT THAT TIME
ALL ASPECTS OF SAFETY, INCLUDING THE POSSIBLE HAZARDS
TO THE OPERATING HANDS AND GENERAL PUBLIC, WERE TAKEN
INTO ACCOUNT AND CONCLUSION WAS REACHED THAT NO UNDUE
HAZARD EXISTED. THE TESTS, WHICH HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY
THE UNITED STATES, INDICATE THAT EVEN
UNDER EXTREMELY UNLIKELY CONDITIONS OF COMPLETE INSTANTENOUS
FUEL EXPOSURE TO WATER, THERE IS LITTLE, IF ANY,
POSSIBILITY OF POLLUTION ATTAINING UNSAFE LIMITS. WE UNDER-
STAND THAT EVEN IN SUCH AN UNLIKELY EVENTUALITY
A FLOW OF 5,000 GALLONS PER DAY WOULD ITSELF DILUTE THE

DISSOLVED MATERIAL TO SAFE DRINKING WATER LEVELS.
IT IS ALSO BELIEVED BY SCIENTISTS THAT THE DANGERS OF
POLLUTION ON INSTANTANEOUS EXPOSURE TO AIR ARE ALSO MINIMAL.
IN BRIEF THEY CLAIM THAT THE DESIGN DETAILS AND
PROTECTIVE SYSTEMS ARE SUCH AS TO ENSURE
THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE SAFETY AGAINST
SPLINTERING AND CONSEQUENTIAL CONTAMINATION AND
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS.

NOTWITHSTANDING THE SAFETY FACTOR IN THE DESIGN AND
THE RESULTS OF PHYSICAL SEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC DETECTION
NOW THAT OUR GOVERNMENTS ATTENTION HAS BEEN DRAWN TO IT,
WE ARE MAKING RENEWED EFFORTS TO MAKE OURSELVES TRIPLY
SURE. IT IS PROPOSED TO APPOINT A COMMITTEE OF SCIENTISTS
TO STUDY AND ASSESS THE PROBLEM AND WITH THE
HELP OF ALL POSSIBLE EXPERT ADVICE, TO RECOMMEND SUCH
FURTHER ACTION AS MAY BE CONSIDERED NECESSARY TO SAFEGUARD
AGAINST FUTURE HAZARDS TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND TO THE
PEOPLE. WE HAVE TAKEN IMMEDIATE ACTION TO OBTAIN FRESH
SAMPLES OF THE WATER FROM THE UPPER REACHES.
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 05959 02 OF 02 171321Z

AS I MENTIONED, WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT. THE US AUTHORITIES HAD PROVIDED TECHNICAL
DETAILS, SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION AND SOPHISTICATED
EQUIPMENT AT THE TIME WHEN THE SEARCH OPERATIONS FOR THE MISSING
POWER-PACK WERE BEING MADE IN THE SUMMER OF 1966.

MR. SPEAKER, I CAN RECALL THE CRITICAL SITUATION WITH WHICH
WE WERE FACED DURING THOSE DAYS OF CONCERN, APPREHENSION AND
ANXIETY. THE AUTHORITIES CONCERNED IN INDIA AT THE
HIGHEST LEVEL ASSESSED THE SITUATION IN TERMS OF CERTAIN
PRECAUTIONARY AND EFFECTIVE DEVICES TO IDENTIFY THE VARIOUS
THREATS AND CONTINGENCIES AND DECIDED UPON THE MEASURES
WHICH I HAVE OUTLINED ABOVE. IT IS CLEAR FROM THE
RECORDS THAT AS FAR AS HUMAN AGENCIES COULD PROVIDE AGAINST
HAZARDS THEY WERE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. IT IS
UNFORTUNATE THAT NATURE INTERVENED TO PRESENT FOR THE FUTURE
AS WE NOW FIND IT A CONTINUING SOURCE OF APPREHENSION AND
ANXIETY.

HOWEVER, AS FAR AS I SEE NO CAUSE FOR ALARM ON
GROUNDS OF HEALTH OR ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS EXISTS.
THE INDIRECT EVIDENCE SO FAR IS THAT THE SAFETY
PRECAUTIONS BUILT INTO THE PACK MAY BE AS EFFECTIVE AS
HAS BEEN CLAIMED AND IF SO POLLUTION EFFECTS MAY NOT
TAKE PLACE IN THE FUTURE. IT IS GRATIFYING THAT NONE
HAVE BEEN DETECTED SO FAR. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ASSURE

THE HOUSE THAT TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, NO OTHER DEVICE OF
THIS KIND EXISTS ON INDIAN SOIL AND NO SUCH OPERATIONS
WHICH CARRY POTENTIAL NATIONAL HAZARDS WOULD BE PERMITTED BY
US. END TEXT.

2 COMMENT FOLLOWS SEPTTEL.
GOHEEN

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